

VZCZCXRO9903  
PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHCHI #0071/01 1550133  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 040133Z JUN 09  
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1050  
INFO RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1132  
RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0084  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0059  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000071

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/4/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [SNAR](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMA: ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS RETHINKING STRATEGY IN WAKE OF  
SPECULATION ABOUT BORDER DEFENSE FORCE

CHIANG MAI 00000071 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)  
-----

Summary and Comment  
-----

¶1. (C) In the wake of a rumored GoB plan for armed ethnic ceasefire groups to integrate into Burma's security forces as border guards or hand in their weapons altogether, several groups are reportedly contemplating whether to comply. The United Wa State Army is reportedly exploring the option of joining the current self-proclaimed Burmese Government in exile, and the two most important Karen armed groups (who oppose each other) have entered into secret talks.

¶2. (C) Comment: Speculation has circulated widely that the GOB will persuade or force armed cease-fire ethnic groups to disarm; the alleged plan for a new border guard force is the latest iteration. While that effort remains a possibility, Embassy Rangoon notes that so far the regime has not made public its intentions. Nonetheless, the fact that some members of key ethnic groups are considering how to respond to such pressure demonstrates expectations of renewed GOB efforts to address ethnic challenges prior to the 2010 elections, and the potential impact of any such step. We note recent clashes between armed ethnic groups and the Burma Army that have spilled across the border into Thailand. If some of these groups adopt a stiffer posture vis-a-vis the regime, it is possible that the number of such incidents may rise. We might also see an increase in the number of Burmese seeking refuge in Thailand, even as the RTG finds it necessary to strengthen its border defenses. End  
Summary and Comment.

-----  
Wa to Join Exile Government?  
-----

13. (C) On May 19, Pol/Econ chief met in Mae Sot with a member of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and a western journalist who has been a Burma watcher for over 20 years. They told us that speculation the GOB may require armed ethnic ceasefire groups to integrate into a newly-created Border Defense Force or hand in their weapons prompted a United Wa State Army (UWSA) official to contact the Mon National Liberation Army Commander to express interest in joining the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) -- the self-proclaimed Burmese Government in exile.

14. (C) According to the NMSP's Kyaw Nyunt, the UWSA is not prepared to enter the Border Defense Force at the regime's behest, and is considering other options. He added that the Wa were even ready to finger GOB and military officials profiting from the drug trade if the U.S. would drop the more than 20 indictments against UWSA leaders still pending in Federal Court.

(Note: we presume any such Wa offer would in reality only be offering the USG information we already have on regime officials whom we cannot bring to justice, in exchange for dropping charges against people we still have a chance of bringing to trial).

15. Kyaw Nyunt said the NCGUB is still thinking over the UWSA's request. It is concerned about the potential negative U.S. reaction to allowing indicted drug traffickers to join it.

-----  
What about the Karen?  
-----

CHIANG MAI 00000071 002.2 OF 002

16. (C) Meanwhile, Karen and Royal Thai Army (RTA) contacts confirmed to us on May 20 that the Karen National Union (KNU), which has been engaged in conflict with the Burmese regime for over 50 years, has held secret discussions recently with the pro-regime Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). The KNU reports its is lobbying the DKBA hard to defect, and that DKBA leaders remain split over how to respond to a GOB directive to join the new Border Defense Force.

17. (C) Our RTA contact opined that if the DKBA decides not to join the Border Defense Force, the regime will have to rethink its approach. The GOB, he asserted, needs the DKBA more than the DKBA needs it. He noted that when the Burma Army attacks the KNU, DKBA troops lead the assault. DKBA units consist of 400 soldiers, he stated, whereas Burma Army units only have a fighting strength of 180. In his view, the regime is particularly keen to have the DKBA in the Border Defense Force because the DKBA - which taxes border trade, benefits from the drug trade, and is operating from a position of financial and military strength - has gotten too big for its britches.

18. (C) Our RTA contact told us that if the DKBA and KNU were to rejoin forces, the RTG would have to prepare to receive greater numbers of refugees and strengthen its border defenses. KNU contacts told us the regime had given the DKBA three months to formally respond to its directive to join the Border Defense Force. In the RTA's view, if the DKBA does not comply with the GOB's order, the regime is likely to find another ethnic group to serve as a test case for Border Defense Force implementation

rather than run the risk of the DKBA rejoining the KNU. Once the DKBA has had some time to observe the Border Defense Force functioning, the regime will renew pressure on the DKBA to join, he speculated.

19. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Rangoon.  
MORROW